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Films as archives of leadership theories: The Terminator film franchise.

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I imagine a far distant future from where I can look back at our present as if it is the history of our descendants, as indeed it will be. What might those descendants learn about leadership from our present, and may those lessons become available to us through this thought experiment?

Nothing has survived the destruction of leadership texts, save a few scattered relics that suggest many more must have existed. Films from the second half of the 20th Century have survived, and there appear to be sufficient references to leadership in these to allow us to develop an understanding of how leadership was understood by our ancients. Indeed, films may tell us more about leadership than academic texts: commentators of the time accused academic texts of being inadequate because they privileged rationality and thus failed to account for subjectivities and emotional perspectives (Czarniawska-Joerges and de Monthoux, 1994). As Hassard and Holliday (1998:1) argued, 'popular culture offers more dramatic, more intense and more dynamic representations of organization than management texts'. Relatedly, debates in the first two decades of the 21st century critiqued leadership and management researchers' claims to be writing something that was scientific. They were engaged in the craft of writing fiction, it was argued for, as Rhodes and Brown (2005, p. 477) observed, 'notionally "factual" accounts of research …do not tend to accept or recognize their role in constructing the realities that they purport to represent'. Indeed, organizations, the very stuff of the discipline of leadership, were argued to be fictions 'in the sense that through intentional acts of pretense, of actively imagining an organization, we are able to produce some kind of understanding of what organizations are. Fiction is in this sense not simply a heuristic for understanding organizations, but it is the core, or constitutive, process through which organizations are imagined and made sense of, and that shapes in a very real sense how people act around them' (Savage, Cornelissen and Franck, 2017: 4). The boundaries between 'real' and 'fictional' were under severe challenge, it would seem, in that time before leadership texts were destroyed.

We understand now that our ancestors followed our even more ancient forebears, the ancient Greeks, in articulating major cultural tensions through the medium of drama (Steiner, 1984). Where the ancient Greeks had perhaps only two major forms of story-telling, the tragedy and the comedy, by the 20th century many genres of story-telling had evolved. Extant texts from the period suggest that one in particular, science fiction or Sci Fi, encouraged dramatists to engage in use of their imaginations to allow 'bigger truths' to speak through their work. Sci Fi untethered

authors from the binds of reality and allowed them to imagine worlds where the laws of physics, alongside numerous other laws, did not apply. Their stories on the one hand were 'surface' representations arising from imaginations set free to wander at will, but on the other hand there are deeper truths discernible in them. What can be found there is what various commentators of the time called the 'cultural unconscious' (see, for example, Stein, 1984), or what a theorist of the psyche, Bollas (1993, 1995) called the 'unthought known'. That is, this was a culture in which people both as individuals and collectives were believed to have an 'unconscious' that informed and influenced their actions in ways of which they were unaware. The 'cultural unconscious' referred to a society's foundational stories that were buried so deeply beneath the sedimented layers of dead metaphors, myths and other stories that they could not be told in language. However, they burst through in multitudes of ways, informing and, to a certain extent, governing, everyday practices. Sigmund Freud (2012), for example, 'invented' - or was it that he remembered, or looked inside himself and found the story hidden in his own desire? - a myth of the primeval father, a man so powerful and cruel to his sons that they murdered and subsequently ate him. Guilt drove them to erect a totem in his honour. This, Freud argued, was the origin of religion, with the need to appease that slain father pushing up from the unconscious into everyday religious observance. Novels, films and dramas were forums through which such foundational stories could erupt into conscious thought. That is, people 'knew' deeper truths (the unthought known) but needed mechanisms to bring them into conscious thought. Films in general, but Sci Fi in particular, articulated eruptions from the unconscious of 'the ego's era' (Brennan, 2002), that era when the individual regarded itself as a sun around which all other's egos orbited (de Beauvoir, 2014). Sometimes an artist might deliberately attempt to voice certain ideas but as often as not, it was believed, the culture, or zeitgeist, or discourses, spoke through cultural artifacts such as films. It was the role of the thinker to analyse the entrails of these artifacts to disinter what was hidden beneath the surface account.

Science fiction films are particularly useful for our purpose of rebuilding theories of leadership because they are awash with depictions of leaders, and so they offer remarkable resources for understanding how leadership was envisioned (if not practised) in the early 21st century. But, as the above discussion suggests, it would be an error to think of these films as presenting straightforward depictions of leadership. They did not provide direct, easily accessible descriptions of topics but rather often showed them obliquely or hermeneutically, as sub-texts almost hidden beneath dominant texts. We know this from remnants of other texts from that period that writers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries called 'the anthroposcene'. These texts argued that films played a far more complicated role than 'mere' entertainment. Fictional narratives more generally were advocated as a resource for making sense of organizations (Rhodes and Brown, 2005) but, beyond this, films were understood to sometimes directly influence 'knowledge'. Films made at the time for family entertainment by the Disney Corporation were argued to have provided populations with an understanding of the Middle Ages that was palpably inaccurate but appeared to be historical truth to cinema-going audiences (Pugh, 2012). Sometimes films buttressed the status quo: Disney sought to perpetuate capitalism (Giroux and Pollock, 2010), and science fiction was accused of perpetuating a gender order in which women were weak and subservient second-class citizens (Yehya, 2001/2004, in Czarniawska and Gustavsson, 2008). Furthermore, films (as an aspect of popular culture) were understood to actively influence the everyday world of work: popular culture, it was argued, not only re-presented but *shaped* actual behaviours in workplaces (Czarniawska and Rhodes, 2006).

They achieved this through their provision of representations of working life, guidance on how to respond, and ideas about how work should be conducted (Rhodes and Parker, 2008). Cinema, as Cooper (with Parker, 1998) outlined, provided the mechanism that made 20th/21st century thinking possible. Quoting Merlin Donald (1991) and Gianni Vattimo (1992), Cooper argued that cinema should be understood as the 'machinery' of 'the hybrid modern mind' that *performs* the social and cultural mind. That is, cinema was not just the communication of reality but its expression and performance. Cinema was reality itself: it represented life and life re-presented itself as cinema.

The merit of exploring films of that era to rebuild a theory of leadership cannot therefore be gainsaid: we enter into the thought-processes of leadership theorists of the period if we explore cinema's articulation of what leadership could mean. If we follow the analytical thought processes of that time, then we can use the ancient film archive to understand how leadership and cinema each informed the other, with cinematic representations mimetic of leaders who themselves modeled themselves on those very representations.

But, to emphasise, to understand the work that films did in constructing leadership requires far more than a superficial reading of their stories. Film theorists of the time understood that these cultural artifacts articulated major concerns through putting them into visual, aural and/or verbal forms that had several levels, all nested in each other, with the visible, comprehensible, first layer of a story disguising second and other layers (Monaco, 2013). Film deconstruction was a process in which the 'obvious' account, or the story immediately available to an audience, had to be peeled back and a process of hermeneutic reading then had to be undertaken to allow identification of other accounts that showed how the celluloid image articulated impossible desires and in-articulable fears. For example, 'zombie apocalypse' and 'slasher' movies, popular with teenage audiences in the last quarter of the 20th century, articulated the disfunctionality of nuclear families (Gill, 2002; Wee, 2006). Gender theorists found in films the mechanisms through which women were both subordinated and constituted as the sex that *should be* subordinate to men (Mulvay, 1989). That is, women appeared as protagonists in stories but, secondly, at a deeper level, their presence was one that invited the male gaze, so that, thirdly, women learned that to be 'a woman' required that they become creatures who existed to be looked at (Copjec, 2004). War films encapsulated the fragility of masculinity even though, superficially, they lauded its seemingly-inviolable strengths (Godfrey, Lilley and Brewis, 2007). With regard to science fiction, it was argued at the time that Sci Fi was just as false, and just as true, as organization science (Parker et al, 1999). Sci Fi films offered not just the escapism of a story but also acute observations of contemporary organizational reality. That is, they could be read firstly as adventure stories, but secondly the presence of organizations in these films meant Sci Fi also offered 'often quite detailed interrogations of what organizations do – and how these practices might be resisted' (Parker et al, 1999, p. 582). What they were represented as doing was reprehensible – the pursuit of profit above all other considerations was shown, in film after film, to lead to the destruction of the humanity in the human. Thirdly, films also articulated deeper desires, often unspoken ones, about organizational life. They allowed, for example, a dreaming of an impossible escape from the mundanity of the workplace quotidian (Parker, 2013).

In this report to the post-leadership world I will follow this layered process of analyzing a film. My focus is the first three of the Terminator series of films, referred to from now on as T1

(released in 1984), T2 (1991) and T3 (2003) respectively. Attempts to resuscitate what was a lucrative franchise in Terminators 4 and 5 failed because the films, although profitable, were poorly received by critics and are, frankly, tedious and add nothing to the analysis, so I will not explore them here. I will firstly describe the surface stories the films recount, then, secondly, will explore what they ostensibly say about organizations and how they laud leaders and leadership. That will lead me to an exploration of what these films tell us about followers who are, of course, an inherent aspect of leadership. My interpretation suggests that our ancients saw leaders and leadership as the means by which organizations could be resisted and, ideally, overthrown. At the same time they suggested that to be a follower to those very leaders was to be put in a life-threatening situation where one's responsibility for protecting the leader could, and very possibly would, lead to one's own annihilation. I conclude by bringing these two somewhat contradictory analyses together.

Terminator: first layer - the Story

The Terminator series imagines a post-apocalyptic future when the vast majority of the human race has been wiped out by a global defence network, Skynet, built by Cyberdyne Systems. Skynet has become self-aware and, perceiving all humans as a threat to global security, seeks to exterminate them. It achieves this through triggering nuclear Armageddon. Each film has four main protagonists. The first is John Connor, a leader of the resistance in the post-apocalyptic world. In the first film he appears in the pre-apocalyptic world only as a foetus, in T2 as a teenager, and in T3 as a grown man trying to escape his destiny. The second major character is Sarah Connor, John's mother. She does not appear in T3, having died, the story-line said, of leukaemia. The other two main protagonists are beings from the post-apocalyptic world, in which Skynet has been able to develop time travel. One of these beings is sent back in time to protect John Connor and another to eradicate him. In T1 the Terminator, played by body-builder, actor and, subsequently, politician, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has to kill John Connor's mother so that he can never be born; in T2 the aim is to kill the teenage Connor, and in T3 the plan is to assassinate as many of the people who were to become resistance fighters as possible. In each film the killer is a cyborg-like, super-powerful killing machine. In T1 Schwarzenegger is one of those seemingly-indestructible assassins, but in T2 and T3 his role alters dramatically: he becomes a protector rather than a slayer. Schwarzenegger's change of allegiance, from destroyer to protector, is accounted for by the type of cyborg of which he is an example having become out-dated as Skynet built superior killing-machines. The cyborg played by Schwarzenegger is re-programmed by the Resistance as a protector (who must not kill humans). In T1, John Connor's protector is a human soldier sent back by the future John Connor to protect the woman who will become his mother. Sarah and the soldier fall for each other, resulting in her pregnancy – the soldier that John Connor sent back to save his mother is his father.

The story arc of T1 focuses solely on the protection of Sarah Connor. That the soldier sent back from the future by John Connor is John Connor's father, so John Connor could not have existed without his having been able to send his biological father back in time, is a time-travel philosophical riddle that the film avoids exploring. In T2 the narrative is concerned with the attempts of Sarah, the teenage John, and the now-protective Terminator to prevent Cyberdyne Systems from developing Skynet. They discover the identity of the engineer responsible for its development. T2 repeats T1's strategy of trying to prevent the future through changing the

conditions that made it possible in the past, but this time it is Sarah who sets out to kill the engineer. In a fine scene that encapsulates the deontological Trolley-Man dilemma - can it ever be ethical to kill even if an act of murder would save many other lives? - Sarah struggles with the enormity of killing another human whose death might save billions of lives. Saved, the engineer reveals that he has reverse-engineered a limb of the first Terminator, the only part of it not destroyed at the *denouement* of T1. The second time-travelling conundrum (there are others) is encountered in this moment: the future Armageddon is made possible only by something that exists only after that Armageddon has occurred. The group set out to destroy that limb, and in a shoot-out the engineer dies but he is able to destroy Skynet in his final moments. Armageddon has been avoided. In the midst of all this there are many fight- and chase-scenes involving the shape-shifting, cold and emotionless terminator sent from the future with the order to kill.

T2 ends with a sigh of relief: Armageddon has been avoided. In T3 this is shown to be a mistake: Armageddon has been deferred but is unavoidable. Sarah Connor is now dead, of leukaemia. There is a new female protagonist, Kate, who will become John Connor's wife. Schwarzenegger, Connor and Kate battle against a female terminator whose task is to destroy as many future resistance fighters as possible. This seems to require long, extended chase scenes that, to this viewer at least, are tedious and repetitive. One leads them eventually to the mausoleum where Sarah Connor's coffin is stored: her body is not in it because she had arranged for the casket to be filled instead with a large cache of lethal weapons. The trio's task now is to try to dissuade Kate's father, who is chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, from activating Skynet. They are too late. With war immanent they set off to try to get to a site where, John and Kate believe, Skynet's core is located. After chases and battles between the Terminator and its more technologically-advanced opponent, the Terminator eventually sacrifices itself as it helps John and Kate enter the bunker they have been seeking. But it is a nuclear fall-out shelter. Armageddon begins. John, safe in the bunker, starts to take command of the survivors who contact him.

These three films are rollicking stories, able to keep restless teenage grandsons glued to their seats while their academic grandparent gets caught up in analysing their sub-plots. But on the surface at least reports of the time suggested there was little new about them apart from impressive developments in computer animation: they were traditional chase films of the period, involving a Manichean struggle between heroes and villains. Nevertheless, these films deserve a deeper reading for they touch on deep philosophical issues signaled only implicitly on the screen. It is perhaps no surprise that the internet in the early 21st century was awash with discussions of the films' philosophy. A few examples will suffice. It is existentialist, one academic blogger reported (http://rhube.co.uk/wp/2014/10/15/existentialism-and-the-terminator/) because it preaches the message that we are in charge of making our own futures (see also http://www.terminatorfiles.com/media/articles/moviesfacts_005.htm). It explored what it is to be human, wrote another (http://catholicskywalker.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/the-philosophy-of-terminator.html). Academic texts were equally enthusiastic about exploring the Terminator series of films for ways of analysing what was then the present. T1 and T2 diagnose changes and stabilities in masculinities, argued Jeffords (2012), or problematize Cartesian and other dualisms such as that of gender (Holland, 1995), or force humankind to face its own destiny as one in which it may no longer exist (Kimball, 2002), a trope repeated several times in discussions of Sci Fi (see examples in the edited collection by Smith, Higgins, Parker and Lightfoot, 2001). Terminator, in a similar fashion to other cultural artefacts in our ancient film archive, including

films such as *Bladerunner* and Sci Fi television series such as *Battlestar Galactica* (2004) and *Humans* (2015), interrogated how the human could be defined: can a 'machine' be(come) human, or a human a machine? (Littmann, 2009). That is, science fiction provoked deep philosophical questions in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. However, I have been unable to find any discussions of Sci Fi and leadership, even though leadership is represented over and over in Sci Fi films, so I turn now to exploring what theories of leadership can be discerned in the Terminator series of films.

Terminator: second layer (1) – the leader

I am now going to peel away that first layer, the straightforward recounting of the films' story lines, and explore their implicit theory about leaders and leadership. The analysis of this section leads to an understanding that leadership was understood to be concerned with the protection of people from the ravages imposed by organizations.

The organizations that feature in Terminator are gigantic, faceless, inhuman destroyers. Cyberdene Systems and the military-industrial complex more generally are organizations whose sole pursuit was described as the building of weapons that countries could use to wipe out each other's populations. It is hard, today, to think that humanity could be so bent on its own destruction but these films captured a then very real fear that, through their own aggression, human beings could wipe each other from the face of the earth. But the films suggest that the ordinary, every-day individual was not hell-bent on such an unimaginable pursuit. They show people enjoying themselves in bars, going on dates, working in mundane jobs, raising children, selling petrol and being generally concerned with their own minor role in making the world go round. Some people are shown doing their jobs, as police officers, nurses, psychiatrists. They have no role in the wider scheme of things, only in keeping things going. Their ties to the wider organization seem tenuous at best – they do the jobs they have been hired to do, in the ways they have learned how to do them.

It is when the films peer into the more senior echelons that the vileness of corporations is seen. Organizations are represented as juggernauts that are beyond the control of individuals. The films show that some form of brain-washing, or zombification, happens to those in the senior echelons of organizations – the collective leadership is dysfunctional, able to set in train processes that they then have no power to control or contain. They are powerful and powerless at the same time.

This image of organizations is perhaps exemplified in the mysterious post-Armageddon organization that can develop time-travel and break other rules of physics by developing metal that can melt and form itself into shapes that mimic the last thing it has touched. Nothing of this corporation is ever shown in T1, T2 or T3, save for its robotic foot-soldiers stamping out the life of any human being they encounter, and the dread emissaries it sends back in time to kill John Connor. The trajectory of the films' stories is governed by this mysterious, faceless organization that is bent on eradicating the human race that begat it. In the idiom of the day, the films portray a gigantic Oedipal struggle in which the metallic offspring seeks to overthrow its fleshy progenitor and take possession of the Earth.

This, the Terminator series tell us, is the reason why leadership is needed: to protect innocent individuals from faceless corporations. It also tells us the form that that leadership should take: it should be embodied in the shape of a heroic individual, a person with a face and a name whose destiny is pre-determined and who will be tested to destruction. John Connor is destined for the greatness of leadership and for the severe demands it will bring. He has no choice in this: his path has been carved out for him since before his conception. He, this named person with a face, will protect the population against *faceless*, out-of-control organizations.

We have uncovered texts from the period that argue certain popular mass media forms of entertainment articulated populations' loathing for their employers, offered them a form of wish-fulfillment through denigrating companies, and allowing them to dream of an end to the futility of lives lived at the behest of a management that served no purpose other than to maximize profit (Parker, 2013). In the Terminator series we see something deeper than this frustration of being reduced to the status of unthinking automata that exist only to achieve the organizations' purpose. That is, these films articulate a deep unease bordering on terror of lives being in the control of over-mighty, faceless corporations that can make all their staff expendable.

We do not see these corporations, as I noted above, but they are embodied in the Terminators sent from the future. Their faces are expressionless and emotionless. Although they can mimic the human they are inhuman. They have an objective and they pursue that objective heedless of any other considerations. They are beyond the power of any ordinary human being's resistance, humans seem almost totally impotent against them. They cannot be changed or destroyed. They are destructive and they aim is to destroy you, the long-ago viewer of these films.

This suggests how dire must have been the lives of working people in the early 21st century. The films are not documentaries, so we cannot read them as descriptions of reality. All we can do is interrogate the reasons why they had such an appeal to so many people, and I suggest those reasons lie in their articulating the sheer desperation of mundane working lives in this period.

But they also offer a form of wish-fulfillment, because they say there *is* a way out of this mess. This is through the leadership of a hero, John Connor, who will lead a rising against these destructive corporations. This will result in their overthrow and the flowering of a new Garden of Eden where work has meaning because it nourishes the human race rather than being used to till the fields of humankind's exploitation.

So I offer this as the theory of leaders and leadership that circulated in the early 21st century. The Terminator series, I have argued, contains a theory of leadership that can be disinterred through exploring it as an articulation of the inarticulate desires of the working masses. This theory argues that the films show the existence of deep desires for a leader who will lead a rebellion against overly-powerful and utterly exploitative corporations. These corporations lack a human face; they are known for their effects (reducing workers to profit-making opportunities) but appear so gargantuan that there is no way to evade or challenge them. There is no-one inside the organization who challenges them: organizations are leader-free territory with everyone above the level of ordinary worker brain-washed into conforming with the organization's requirements. Leaders must come from outside, heroes who will lead the rebellion and thus free workers from the destruction wrought on them every day in the world of work.

In sum, this ancient theory of leadership argued that leaders are followed because they *oppose* the organization.

Terminator: second layer (2) – a theory of followership

It is difficult to conceive of any theory of leadership that does not have an accompanying theory of followership: the two are inevitably intertwined and mutually dependent. I will suggest that the theory of followership contained in the Terminator films is quite ambivalent. Firstly it is one that regards followers as superior to leaders: they are strong whilst leaders are vulnerable and must be protected by followers. Secondly, this task of protecting the leader gives the *raison d'etre* or very identify of the follower. It arises from a blind belief in the leader: on the skimpiest of evidence save prognostications about a much-to-be-feared future, individuals abandon their identities and become followers. Thirdly, the films argue that the position of follower is one that is both inherently dangerous and corrupting.

The vulnerability of leaders underpins the entire story arc of these films, such that the follower has to become the leader's protector. Followers exist only for this purpose, and in doing that service they become expendable. A recap of the story in T1, T2 and T3 illuminates this. T1 opens with two creatures arriving, naked, from what seems like outer space. One of these is a cyborg, the Terminator, and the other a fragile human soldier who will impregnate the future Leader's mother. After doing that duty he will die. Everyone else who might have protected Sarah Connor, and thus the as-yet unborn future leader, is killed by the Terminator: her friends, her family, her flat mates, all are exterminated. The Terminator, played by Schwarzenegger, undergoes a damascene conversion in between T1 and T2: he returns in T2 as the protector/follower of the leader, John Connor, as he does again in T3, but in both T2 and T3 Schwarzenegger's character dies, sacrificing itself so that John Connor (and thus, we are told, humankind itself) can live. Along the way numerous other characters who might threaten the leader's future are exterminated: hospital staff, police officers, and innocent bystanders amongst others. These are not followers, but through coming into the orbit of John Connor they die. It seems that leadership was understood to have lethal implications for those who came into contact with it, but because the leader was so vulnerable and needed protection then followers, who believed totally in the future seemingly foretold for this leader, had no option save to gather around and join the fight. To be a follower was to be blindly faithful and in jeopardy.

The most interesting of all the follower/protectors is Sarah Connor, the mother. Her body is the vessel through which the leader will arrive, but the films portray her as far more than a passive container. In T1 the leader is little more than an idea, a being yet to be born but who must be protected at all costs. The mother is persuaded of the accuracy of the news that she will bear the future saviour of humankind; she subsequently turns herself into a warrior and, ultimately, into armaments, to protect her child. Our first sight of her in T1 is of a curly-haired young woman interested in enjoying herself, but by the opening scenes of T2 she has transmogrified. Our first sight of her in T2 is of her doing body-building exercises, her body rippling with muscles that are emphasized by the white singlet she is wearing. Everything she does is motivated by the protection of her son, the future saviour. The stripping away of everything that is superfluous to this aim reaches its climax in T3 where the actual human being does not appear at all. The audience is told that she has died of leukaemia. It is shown her coffin. The casket falls to the ground, its lid opens. Leaning forward perhaps in eschatological curiosity the audience expects to

see her skeleton but what pours out is not bones but a cache of weapons. Rather than lay her body down to rest in death the mother/follower/protector has turned flesh into pure fighting machine, devoid of any agency save the intent of being used to protect the leader.

But that is in T3. In T2 the young woman to whom we had been introduced in T1 has become a fighter. She is herself now a killing machine, which is somewhat ironic given that the Terminator, become protector now rather than eradicator, has vowed not to take human life. She will challenge anyone who threatens the life of her son, the future leader. Except, that is, when she comes face-to-face with the man who is building the lethal system that will destroy humanity. If she killed him at that moment she would change the trajectory taking the world to its mortal destiny. Yet she cannot. I referred above to the moment where she leans over the recumbent, scared scientist, his family watching on, ready to pull the trigger, as an enactment of the deontological trolley dilemma, but this scene can be interpreted in another way. If life continues as normal, if there is no Armageddon, then her son will not achieve his destiny, he will not become leader. Instead his life will be normal, perhaps average, and she has been preparing him for something far higher. If she saves humanity then she will sacrifice the emergence of her son as leader. The leader has to be protected at all costs, even if that cost is the destruction of almost the entire human race. His destiny is paramount. She thus sacrifices herself, becoming someone totally different from who she might have been if she was not doomed to be the mother of the leader.

The theory of followers and followership contained within the Terminator films is thus one of the follower as a disciple whose conviction concerning the need to protect the leader has the status of a religious conviction. Annihilation threatens anyone who becomes a follower, whether it is the annihilation of the material body or of the immaterial self. It seems that followership required the death of the ego, of agency and of any conception of a 'self'.

Conclusion

This, then, is one of the theories of leaders, leadership, followers and followership circulating in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as encapsulated in the highly popular 'Terminator' series of science fiction films. Leaders and leadership were understood to be vital to resisting, if not overcoming, organizations whose excesses wreaked chaos and imposed despair upon the masses. This was the era of the anthropocene, when global populations were concerned with how humankind, or rather gigantic, global corporations, was/were killing the planet Earth. The Terminator franchise shows a planet destroyed by gigantic corporations. Perhaps these films represented the individual's wish to rise up and somehow stop the destruction they saw organizations wreaking on the planet in the name of profit. Such uprisings would require leaders – strong, charismatic, cunning, intelligent, leaders, able to rally people to the cause of overthrowing the planet-destroyers and replacing them with something unnamed and non-articulated, but located in the local and the social (T1, T2 and T3 linger on shots of young children playing with friends and families).

At the same time there is an uneasiness about becoming the follower to such leaders. Followership was caught up with individual annihilation; leaders were vulnerable and needed protecting, and that was the role of their follower/protectors, but that role meant the social death of the self and, ultimately perhaps, the physical death of the body. Followers were dispensable.

This presents us with a conundrum. Leaders are needed to lead a revolution against faceless corporations, but the followers of such leaders sacrifice the self. Arnold Schwarzenegger and his fellow actors seem to have articulated a fear of becoming so absorbed in the vision of another human being, 'the leader', that one's own ego, individuality, agency, capacity for independent and critical thought, freedom, and more, was lost. The desire for a leader seems to have implied a suicidal wish.

Perhaps these films articulated the meaninglessness of life at the time. The theory they contain is that populations were the prey of corporations yet the only way to resist these faceless corporations was through the emergence of leaders who would in their turn ravage followers. The dream of escape was tempered by the nightmare that the only way out involved destruction of the self.

Is this why all texts of leadership seem to have disappeared? Was it because of the eventual recognition that leadership was detrimental to the vast mass of humankind? Because, we must assume, within the sphere of those faceless corporations were other leaders, those who took the decisions that led to the exploitation of humankind and the planet. Leaders may have been desired who would rise up against the faceless leaders of organizations, but the need for this heroic leader arose only because of faceless leaders. Destroying all leadership texts thus seems like a very good idea indeed: the future of humankind was threatened by leaders; leaders were needed to resist those more powerful leaders; and the ordinary person, the follower, was sacrificed regardless of who was 'the leader'.

To paraphrase a Sci Fi trope of the time: leadership is (or was) futile. It was not through the agency of leaders that 21st century populations would put behind them the worst that corporations and their emissaries and flunkies could wreak. Other ways of building a harmonious nurturing social world were needed. The Terminator films were reaching towards that understanding, and sensing that it was time to move on to new ways of thinking about how to organize work and how to run organizations.

I am back

I opened this essay with a statement about carrying out a thought experiment, via a reading of the Terminator film franchise, to see what may emerge about understanding leaders that may be pertinent for the present day. My first reading of the film led me to comprehending the need for leaders to overcome those very leaders of the corporations that are despoiling the planet, fuelling neoliberalism and limiting people's lives. Zoller and Fairhurst (2007) argued something similar: it cannot be assumed that leaders will be loyal to the corporation rather than the people who work in/for it. This chapter therefore supports their arguments. However, it was through exploring the position of followers in the Terminator films that something different emerged: a deep fear about the destructive potential of concepts and practices of leadership, notably against the ego. In modernity's elevation of the egotistical self to the centre of its own universe, this is a form of immaterial violence that needs further exploration. For example, if 'I' am because 'I' think, as Descartes famously argued, then what happens if my thinking is so inhibited by someone else's desire to control what I think – that is, to follow the leader unquestioningly? Do 'I' exist as anything but a flesh-bound robot? That is, this reading of Terminator points to the need for understanding the violence of leadership. This is not the familiar form that violence takes, of an offence against the

embodied self, nor indeed the symbolic violence discussed in Bourdieusian theory, but a different form again, one that attempts to destroy that vital spark that marks 'me' as 'me', as human and not a machine.

There is no space here in which to develop such a theory but (and please excuse the failure to resist this temptation) I will be back, with a more fully-formed theory of the violence of leadership.

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